

EXPLANATORY NOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

- NCD* *A New Canting Dictionary: Comprehending All the Terms, Antient and Modern, Used in the Several Tribes of Gypsies, Beggars, Shoplifters, Highwaymen, Foot-Pads, and all other Clans of Cheats and Villains* (London, 1725).
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*.
- Trivia* Clare Brant and Susan E. Whyman, eds., *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John Gay's Trivia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

TITLE PAGE

- 1 *Nos haec novimus esse nihil*: 'We know these things to be nothing', from Martial, *Epigrams* xiii. 2. 8.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- 2 *Peachum*: like almost all the other character names, descriptive: to 'peach', from 'impeach', is to betray or inform against an alleged criminal—hence 'peach 'em'.

Lockit: an equally fitting trade name for the jailor of Newgate prison.

Macheath: i.e. 'son of the heath'. The heaths around London, such as Hounslow and Bagshot Heaths, were notorious sites of highway robbery.

Most of the other male character names allude to forms of criminality, many using eighteenth-century thieves' cant or slang: *Filch* (to steal); *Jemmy Twitcher* (*twitcher*, pickpocket); *Crook-finger'd Jack* (a pun on the two meanings of 'crooked'); *Robin of Bagshot* (a highwayman, from Bagshot Heath); *Nimming Ned* (*nim*, 'to steal, or whip off or away any thing' [*NCD*]); *Harry Paddington* (*pad*, 'the High-way; also a Robber thereon' [*NCD*]; Paddington is also the London parish where the Tyburn gallows stood); *Matt of the Mint* (the Mint, a district in Southwark, was a haven for criminals and debtors); *Ben Budge* (*budge*, 'one that slips into an House in the dark, and taking Cloaks, Coats, or what comes next to Hand, marches off with them' [*NCD*]).

Apart from *Mrs Peachum*, *Polly Peachum*, and *Lucy Lockit*, all of the female character names signify sexual immorality or prostitution: *Diana Trapes* (*trapes*, 'a dangling Slattern' [*NCD*]); *Mrs Coaxer* (*coax*, seduce or persuade); *Dolly Trull* (*trull*, 'a Whore; also a Tinker's travelling Wife or Wench' [*NCD*]); *Mrs Vixen*, *Suky Tawdry*, and *Molly Brazen* have surnames that suggest sexual availability or excess (*vixen*, a female fox or, colloquially, a shrewish woman; *tawdry*, gaudy or cheap; *brazen*, shameless or insolent); *Betty Doxy* (*Doxies* are

‘She-beggars, Trulls, Wenches, Whores’ [NCD]); *Mrs Slammekin* (*slammekin*, like *trapes*, a slattern or slut). *Jenny Diver* stands somewhat apart, *diver* meaning pickpocket, although there may also be a sexual double meaning, as there is in ‘Low-Dive Jenny’, the character Brecht and Hauptmann based on her in their *Threepenny Opera* of 1928.

INTRODUCTION

- 3 *St. Giles’s*: the London parish of St Giles in the Fields, near Holborn, was portrayed in the period as home to criminals, prostitutes, impoverished authors, foreigners, sodomites, and beggars.

Catches: popular songs in the form of a round, in which the voices enter in succession, singing the same tune and words; often sung as drinking songs.

James Chanter and Moll Lay: generic names for ballad singers. *Lay* can mean both a song and a criminal practice or speciality, and Gay links ballad singing to crime in his 1716 poem, *Trivia*: ‘Let not the Ballad-Singer’s shrilling Strain | Amid the Swarm thy list’ning Ear detain: | Guard well thy Pocket; for these *Syrens* stand, | To aid the Labours of the diving Hand; | Confed’rate in the cheat, they draw the Throng, | And *Cambrick* Handkerchiefs reward the Song’ (*Trivia* 196 [III, 77–82]).

The Swallow . . . the Flower, &c.: conventional poetic similes, used (often to ironic effect) in several of *The Beggar’s Opera*’s airs: the swallow in Air 34; the moth in Air 4; the bee and the flower in Airs 6 and 15; and the ship (or ‘skiff’) in Airs 10 and 47.

our two Ladies: the actresses playing Polly and Lucy, but alluding to the two most celebrated Italian female opera singers of the period, Faustina Bordoni and Francesca Cuzzoni, whose rivalry had led to blows onstage in 1727, parodied in the struggle between Lucy and Polly over Macheath.

Recitative: technique or style of performing passages of dialogue between fully composed arias and ensembles in opera, part way between speech and song, and rhythmically and melodically free; often accompanied by just one or two instruments. Many among English audiences of the period found this style of freely sung speech ‘unnatural’, as the Beggar says.

THE PLAY

- 5 *An old Woman cloathed in Gray, &c.*: title of the ballad whose melody Gay has used for this air. See Appendix for notes on the originals of all the airs in *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly*.

you will order Matters . . . bring her off: manipulate the evidence or bribe the justices so as to get her acquitted at trial.

plead her Belly: women convicted of capital crimes could not be executed while pregnant. If their claims or ‘pleas’ to be so were verified, they might be sentenced to transportation instead (usually after giving birth); in rare cases, the original sentence was carried out after childbirth, but more often the sentence was reduced or suspended.

- 6 *forty Pounds*: the reward paid for information leading to the arrest and conviction of male (but not female, as Peachum notes below) criminals.

Transportation: the practice of shipping convicted criminals to British North American and West Indian (and later, Australian) colonies as indentured servants, usually for a period of seven or fourteen years. To return to Britain before the term had expired was a capital offence.

Lock: 'a Warehouse where stolen Goods are deposited' (Gay, note to III.iii).

take her off: bring about her death by informing against her.

train'd up . . . Gaming-table: it was a commonplace of criminal biographies that young men were seduced into the 'business' of crime either by women or gambling.

We and the Surgeons . . . Professions besides: surgeons, doctors, and quacks were 'beholden' to women, notably prostitutes, for transmitting venereal diseases, whose treatment could be costly.

Newgate: the main criminal prison of London, built on the site of one of the old city gates, and located near the Old Bailey criminal court.

- 7 *Sessions*: terms when criminal trials are held; at the Old Bailey, in this period, there were eight sessions per year.

Six dozen of Handkerchiefs . . . Broad Cloth: along with watches and snuff boxes, these are items commonly stolen by pickpockets or shoplifters. Handkerchiefs of linen or silk were luxury items, as were men's periwigs or wigs (with a ribbon tie at the back); broad cloth is a fine quality cloth used mostly for men's clothes.

petty-larceny Rascal: one who steals goods worth less than a shilling, a non-capital crime (and of no use to receivers like Peachum). Theft of goods worth more than a shilling was grand larceny, a capital offence.

listed: enlisted.

Cart: the condemned were carried from Newgate to the gallows at Tyburn in an open cart.

Robin of Bagshot . . . Bob Booty: all of these names allude satirically to the first (prime) minister, Robert Walpole. Anti-government writers had already played on the similarity of *Robert* and *robber*, as Gay does here with *Robin* and *robbing*, reinforced by the connection to Bagshot Heath and its highway robbers. In thieves' slang, a *bob* was a shoplifter's sidekick; and *booty* is the goods stolen. *Bluff Bob* plays on *bluff*'s double meaning—outspoken (or blunt), and to deceive, especially boastfully—while *Carbuncle* (an ugly pimple or excrescence) and *Gorgon* (a hideous female monster) are rude insults, a common satirical weapon against political enemies.

- 8 *Black-List*: Peachum's list of those he intends to impeach and send to the gallows.

the Camp: that is, military service. Gay here satirically equates the lives and actions of criminals, on the one hand, and soldiers on the other.

- 8 *Venus's Girdle*: Venus, the Roman goddess of love, had a magic girdle or belt (or 'Zone') that made its wearer instantly desirable—or, as Mrs Peachum puts it, made 'her Face look wond'rous smuggly'.

Beneath the left Ear . . . an Adonis!: just as Venus's girdle turns an ugly 'Wench' into a beauty, so a hangman's noose around his neck transforms a lowly criminal 'Youth' into a Lord or Adonis (Venus's beloved).

- 9 *Bank-notes*: not paper currency as we know it, but receipts for money deposited in a bank and payable to the bearer. Thieves or receivers could cash such notes if the original owners had not yet stopped payment.

Quadrille: four-handed card game popular from the 1720s.

Mary-bone and the Chocolate-houses: the Marylebone district of London was known for its pleasure gardens, whose gaming-houses made it a popular haunt of gamblers. Similarly, the city's fashionable chocolate houses gave men a place to gamble while drinking chocolate and socializing.

- 10 *a Temple Coffee-House*: coffeehouses, like chocolate houses, were meeting places for men, and played an important role in eighteenth-century public life. Women, as Peachum suggests, were largely confined to working behind the bar, but if 'handsome' could profit from male attention. A Temple coffeehouse would have been located near the Inner Temple and Middle Temple Inns of Court, and would have been frequented mainly by lawyers and law students.

to make herself a Property: before the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, a married woman's possessions, money, and legal identity belonged and were subject to her husband by the law of coverture, so that she herself was to all intents and purposes 'a Property'.

like a Court Lady to a Minister of State: refers to the political connections between Walpole and women of the royal court, especially Queen Caroline, wife of George II, whom Walpole used as an intermediary to win the King's support.

rip out the Coronets . . . Cambric Handkerchiefs: remove the decorative embroidery (which could identify the original owner) from stolen handkerchiefs; *cambric* is a fine white linen.

Chap: a 'chapman' or pedlar.

- 11 *Oar*: variant spelling of 'ore'.

try'd and imprest: to 'try' is to refine or purify; to 'impress' is to stamp, as in coining.

Juggler: a sleight-of-hand artist.

ply'd at the Opera: practised his pickpocketing trade at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, the London home of Italian opera.

Chairs: sedan chairs, enclosed one-seat vehicles carried on poles by two bearers; available for hire in the period.

Redriff: Rotherhithe, a dockland area on the south bank of the Thames.

- 12 *Fobs*: small watch pockets in men's waistcoats or breeches.

pumpt: held under the spout of a water pump, a form of popular justice for pickpockets caught in the act. See *Trivia* 196 (III, 73-4): 'Seiz'd by rough Hands, he's dragg'd amid the Rout, | And stretch'd beneath the Pump's incessant Spout'.

Hockley in the Hole: Clerkenwell site of a bear garden, where violent popular entertainments and sports—bear and bull baiting, cock fights, wrestling, and so on—were presented.

Old-Baily: the Old Bailey was London's principal criminal court.

go to your Book . . . Ordinary's Paper: the Ordinary was the chaplain of Newgate, responsible for preparing the condemned for death and testing prisoners who pleaded 'benefit of clergy', by means of which literate first-time offenders could have their sentences reduced. The test was to read a passage from the Bible ('your Book'), usually the opening of Psalm 51—the 'Catechism' Filch needs to learn. The Ordinary's papers or *Accounts* were pamphlets giving the life stories and last words or confessions of the condemned as told (supposedly) to the Ordinary himself.

- 13 *Court . . . Assembly*: the royal court and public assemblies were sites of fashionable sociability. Assemblies were less exclusive than the court, but were still largely limited to the higher ranks, who met there to converse, play cards, hear music, dance, and, Polly suggests, learn mercenary values.

thrown upon the Common: to become common property or fall into prostitution, with puns on common-land and common law.

Covent-Garden: known in the period both for its flower market and for its prostitutes, and thus the destination of 'pluck'd' flower and virgin alike.

Jade: a worn-out horse; used disparagingly of women.

- 14 *As Men should serve . . . herself away*: just as Polly has thrown herself away, despite the 'Care and Cost' her parents have spent on dressing her, by marrying Macheath, so men 'fling away' a dish of cucumbers, widely thought to be unfit for eating even when carefully dressed or prepared.

getting: growing richer.

ruin'd: reversing the word's usual sense of a woman who has lost her virginity before marriage, Peachum here means 'married'.

- 15 *squeezing out an Answer from you*: alludes to the legal torture of 'pressing' defendants who had refused to plead guilty or not guilty by placing heavy weights on their chests to force a plea out of them.

upon liking: on approval, or 'married' on a trial basis.

- 16 *nice*: particular; discerning or discriminating.

- 17 *Customers*: Peachum's 'customers' are robbery victims seeking to recover their stolen goods by paying him a fee to locate them and arrange their return.

- 17 *Repeating-Watch*: a watch that struck the most recent hour and quarter hour when a lever was pressed.

Drury-Lane: street and adjoining neighbourhood near Covent Garden, known as the centre of prostitution in London.

Tunbridge: Tunbridge Wells in Kent, a fashionable spa town in the period, and hence also attractive to pickpockets and thieves.

Fuller's Earth: kind of clay (hydrous aluminium silicate) used to clean fabric.

- 19 *Jointure*: legal arrangement by which property is jointly held by a husband and wife or is settled on the wife for her use in case of his death.

peach'd: from 'impeached', informed against or betrayed and so brought to trial.

nick'd the Matter: hit the mark, hit the nail on the head.

- 20 *For on the Rope . . . Depends poor Polly's Life*: audiences would have caught Gay's pun on 'depends', which in addition to meaning rely or be contingent on also meant to hang down.

Turtle: the turtle dove, a traditional symbol of conjugal love and fidelity.

particular: exclusively devoted to one person; overly fastidious.

For the sake of Intelligence: because of the incriminating 'intelligence' Macheath has on them.

- 21 *Stratagem*: cunning or ingenuity.

the Nosegay in his Hand: criminals en route to execution were often given a nosegay or small bouquet of flowers by friends in the crowd, especially in front of St Sepulchre's Church.

the Windows of Holborn: the road to the gallows at Tyburn led from Newgate along Holborn and Tyburn Road (now Oxford Street). Crowds lined the route and looked out from windows along the way, sometimes jeering but often expressing support ('extolling his Resolution') or pity ('Vollies of Sighs') for the condemned.

the Tree: Tyburn Tree, popular name for the gallows.

Jack Ketch: London executioner who died in 1686; later, the nickname for any executioner or hangman.

Conversation: company, including sexual intimacy, the loss of which will 'distract' or drive Polly mad.

- 22 *a Pension out of the Hands of a Courtier*: in this context, a pension is a regular allowance paid to a courtier to secure his political support; or, as Samuel Johnson put it in his 1755 *Dictionary*, 'pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country'.

- 25 *Poor Brother Tom . . . the Otamys at Surgeon's Hall*: the 'Accident' that befell brother Tom was death by hanging. Because he was 'so clever a made' (such a well-built) fellow, his body was taken by the surgeons for

use in an anatomy demonstration, and the skeleton or 'otamy' (from 'anatomy') later put on display in the Barber-Surgeon's Hall.

- 26 *the Western Road*: the road connecting London to Bath and Exeter in the West Country, which crossed Hounslow Heath, a famous highwaymen's haunt.

- 27 *Bawd*: a brothel keeper; a pander or pimp.

Moor-fields: a London district with criminal associations, north of the City.

- 28 *See the Ball . . . Lead to Gold*: in the second quatrain of this air Matt compares the efforts of alchemists ('Chymists') and highwaymen to convert lead into gold. While the alchemists toil like asses, in vain, the highwaymen use lead in the form of a bullet or 'Ball', and the 'Fire' of their pistols, to obtain gold more effectively.

bit: smitten or love-struck, but also tricked or deceived.

The Town . . . would be uninhabited: by seducing young women, Macheath is 'recruiting' them to the ranks of 'free-hearted Ladies' or whores, for the benefit of the men of 'the Town', just as a recruiting officer enlists soldiers into the army. Soldiers and highwaymen alike—'us and the other Gentlemen of the Sword'—ensure that the brothels of Drury Lane are not 'uninhabited'.

- 29 *so strong a Cordial for the Time*: so powerful a stimulant for passing time pleasurably.

Vinegar Yard . . . Lewkner's Lane: sites near Drury Lane associated with prostitution; Jonathan Wild ran a brothel in Lewkner's Lane at one time.

I hope you don't want . . . Paint: I hope you don't require the cosmetics or 'Paint' that women of quality need to 'repair' their looks.

Strong-Waters: alcoholic spirits, such as gin, thought to be unhealthy and corrupting, unlike 'good wholesome Beer'.

Mrs Slammekin . . . affect an Undress: as 'slammekin' means slattern or slut, Macheath is ironic in calling her 'genteel', and in comparing all the women to 'fine Ladies' whose 'Undress' (from the French *déshabillé*) was a fashionably informal manner of dressing, associated with morning wear.

- 30 *Every thing she gets . . . a dozen Tally-men*: all the money she earns from whoring she spends on clothing, with a bawdy pun on 'on her back'. The tally-men she keeps in business sell goods on credit, such as clothes to prostitutes—the trade practised by Mrs Trapes (III.vi).

Turtle: the turtle dove, but here signifying amorousness rather than marital fidelity (cf. I.x).

If Musick be the Food of Love, play on: the opening line of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

A Dance a la ronde in the French Manner: in this context, a burlesque of the formal dances of fashionable society, and of the ballets often included in Italian opera.

- 31 *Cholic*: colic, a stomach complaint.

Mercers: sellers of fine fabrics. Mrs Coaxer's 'Visits' are of course criminal, in competition with other shoplifting 'Interlopers', as in the following speech.

Lutestring . . . Padesoy: two fancy varieties of silk fabric.

the Ogle of a Rattle-Snake: an ogle is an amorous or lecherous look; rattle-snakes were thought to be able to hypnotize their prey (to 'rivet' their eye) by the power of their gaze—an odd, almost oxymoronic image.

Address: adroitness or skill.

- 32 *in keeping*: 'kept' as a lover or mistress.

is thereafter as they be: depends on how they behave.

bating: leaving aside.

A spruce Prentice . . . the Plantations: Mrs Vixen recommends lively, smart-looking apprentices as lovers because they 'bleed' or spend money freely (with perhaps a bawdy second meaning on 'bleed'). To keep their spending up, they turn to crime, and in the end are transported to the colonies—having likely been peached by Mrs Vixen herself.

- 33 *Souse*: sou, a coin of small value.

These: Macheath's pistols, as the following stage direction shows.

- 35 *Dear Madam . . . command me*: in this last exchange, Mrs Slammekin and Dolly Trull ape the manners of polite society in insisting the other take precedence; reinforced by the following stage direction.

Turnkeys: under-jailers.

Garnish: payments extorted from new prisoners as fees for the jailers and drink-money for the other prisoners (see *OED*, definition 1.5); as the ensuing scene shows, the amount paid determined how well one was treated.

nicest: most fastidious or refined.

- 36 *Basilisk*: mythical serpent which could kill with a look or breath.

load of Infamy: the child with which she is visibly pregnant.

- 37 *Bowels*: figuratively, feelings of tenderness or pity; thought to originate in the innermost parts of the body.

- 39 *Brother Peachum*: the repeated use of the word 'brother' in this scene confirmed, to the play's contemporary audiences, that it referred satirically to the enmity between Walpole and Charles, Lord Townshend, his brother-in-law and fellow Whig minister of state—a point reinforced by Peachum's later comparison of himself and Lockit to 'Great Statesmen' who profit from betrayal. In a letter dated 28 March 1728, Swift suggested to Gay that the scene was modelled on the argument between Brutus and Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (IV.ii).

Arrear of the Government: delay in the government's payment of the reward money to those, like Peachum and Lockit, who informed against criminals.

Ned Clincher's Name: a 'clinch' is a pun, so the name could mean joker; *clinch* can also mean to grab hold (clench), so *clinch* could suggest thief. In 1726–7 Swift wrote the comic-satirical poem 'Clever Tom Clinch Going to be Hanged', whose protagonist is defiant to the end and refers to Jonathan Wild as a friend; given the two authors' friendship it's likely that Gay had the poem in mind here.

Condemn'd Hold: an area in Newgate prison where those already tried and sentenced awaited execution.

40 *Halter*: rope used for hanging; noose.

nimm'd: stole, from *nim*, 'to steal, or whip off or away any thing' (*NCD*).

41 *Weeds*: 'widow's weeds' or mourning clothes.

42 *Perquisite*: a 'perk' or tip paid for services rendered; in this context, a bribe.

43 *Sash*: sash window, behind which the male swallow is 'pent' or confined.

for th' Event: because of what has happened, or awaiting the outcome.

44 *Facts*: evidence, especially of evil doing.

bubbled: cheated or deceived; similarly, 'bit', just below, means tricked.

Fetch: ruse or trick.

45 *trapan*: ensnare or beguile.

46 *commit the Folly*: act foolishly; here, to have sexual relations (*folly*, 'a lewd action or desire', *OED*, definition 3b).

48 *burnt*: alludes to two forms of punishment in the period: convicted offenders who received 'benefit of clergy' were 'burnt' or branded on the right thumb, while women convicted of high or petty treason (including wives who had murdered their husbands) could be burned to death.

49 *to score*: to run a tab or keep an account.

are their own Bubbles: make fools of themselves.

50 *leaky in his Liquor*: talkative or indiscreet when drunk.

They fail of a Chap: they have no 'customers' or victims.

51 *a Quartern of Strong-Waters*: a quarter-pint of spirits (most likely gin).

a shotten Herring: a herring after spawning, worn out from excess of sexual activity.

Since the favourite . . . call'd down to Sentence: as female prisoners could not be hanged while pregnant, Filch is acting as a substitute 'Child-getter', since 'the favourite' has been 'disabled', presumably by venereal disease.

tip off: die.

his Lock . . . Crooked Billet: *lock* is 'a Cant Word, signifying, a Warehouse where stolen Goods are deposited' (Gay, note to this line in original text). The *Crooked Billet*, meaning a criminal occupation or place of work, is the sign that identifies his lock.

52 *One Man may steal . . . look over a Hedge*: proverb meaning that some men can get away with crimes while others get in trouble even though innocent.

The ironic implication is that Macheath is unjustly in 'Difficulties' while 'the vilest' of 'Gamesters' (denigrated as 'Mechanics' or manual workers, and thus 'servile' or low) are 'admitted amongst the politest Company'.

53 *deep Play*: high-stakes gambling.

Setting: setting upon or robbing.

Rouleau: a roll or packet of gold coins, loaned by the 'Money-Lenders' to needy gamblers at high rates of interest—condemned by Macheath as 'Extortion'.

in my Cash: has money that belongs to me.

The Coronation Account: the account or record of goods stolen at the coronation of George II in October 1727.

Instalments: the annual ceremony of inauguration of the new Lord Mayor of London—like the coronation, but on a smaller scale, an opportunity for thieves to work the celebrating crowd.

54 *Lady's Tail*: the train of a lady's gown.

she will make a good Hand . . . going into Keeping: Mrs Trapes will use the brocade to make fancy slippers and shoes for prostitutes who are becoming rich men's mistresses.

Pockets: pocket books or purses, tied round the waist and so easy to steal in a crowd.

the last Half Year's Plate: the gold or silver ware stolen over the past six months.

Gudgeons: small, easily caught freshwater fish; metaphorically, gullible fools.

55 *curious*: selective or choosy.

Blacks: mourning clothes.

Mantoes: mantuas, loose-fitting, fashionable gowns.

56 *The Act for destroying the Mint*: an act passed by Parliament in 1723 to do away with the extra-legal status that had made the Mint district in Southwark a haven for criminals and debtors.

the Act . . . Imprisonment for small Sums: a parliamentary act of 1725–6 that prohibited arrests for debts of less than ten pounds in a superior court or forty shillings in an inferior court.

when a Lady can borrow . . . the least Hank upon her: i.e. when one of her prostitute customers can obtain goods from her without fear of being sent to debtors' prison for what they owe—the 'Hank' or hold she had over them before.

under the Surgeon's Hands: under treatment, presumably for venereal disease.

58 *Rat's-bane*: rat poison. Prison scenes featuring poisoned cups were a staple of Italian opera, as in Handel's *Radamisto* (1720) and *Tamerlano* (1724), and are parodied in this and the next three scenes.

I can lay her Death . . . call'd in Question: Gin was very freely and cheaply available, especially in London, and was often of such poor quality as to be poisonous.

Spleen: the spleen was often represented as the seat of anger, melancholy, and low spirits. To have 'the spleen' was also sometimes taken as a sign of sensitivity or refinement.

Vapours: like 'the spleen', a term for ill humour; thought to be caused by exhalations of bodily organs and, like the spleen, particularly associated with women of fashion.

59 *Closet*: a small private room, usually adjoining or within a bedroom.

60 *particular*: devoted to one person.

Coquets: flirts.

chirping: cheering.

62 *Which way shall I turn me?*: Macheath's question echoes Antony's 'O Dolabella, which way shall I turn?' in John Dryden's heroic tragedy *All for Love* (1677), when confronted with the need to choose between his wife Octavia and his lover Cleopatra. Gay's scene may also allude to the classical myth of the Judgement of Hercules, called on to choose between two goddesses representing Virtue and Pleasure. William Hogarth's five paintings of this scene (from *The Beggar's Opera*), based on an early performance, emphasize the mock-heroic parallels to the Hercules story.

63 *sink*: suppress.

64 *Fry*: small fry, from a word meaning a swarm of fishes just spawned.

65 *Brimmer*: drinking glass filled to the brim.

66 *Busses*: kisses.

67 *Jemmy Twitcher . . . surpriz'd me*: since it is clear from III.vi that Mrs Trapes's information led to Macheath's arrest, Jemmy Twitcher must have given the testimony that led to his conviction.

Ship yourselves off . . . a Husband a-piece: this line may be seen to set up the scenario of *Polly*, in which the heroine does ship herself off to the West Indies in search of a husband, although not quite in the way Macheath imagines.

68 *All you that must take a Leap*: this is the only trio in *The Beggar's Opera*, and both imitates and parodies the operatic convention of concluding the action with an ensemble in which the main characters give vent to their feelings. The tune, fittingly, is from a ballad about a hanging. The chorus at the end of the trio may consist of the three protagonists, or may be offstage.

the Toll of the Bell: the bell of St Sepulchre's Church near Newgate, which started tolling a few minutes before the condemned were led from the prison to begin their procession to Tyburn.

- 69 *this kind of Drama*: Italian opera, often derided for its absurd or improbable plots; but also *The Beggar's Opera* itself, whose parodic, promiscuous mix of multiple genres is itself absurd.
- 70 *the Turk, with his Doxies*: may refer either to the Turkish custom of polygamy or, more likely, to the Turkish Sultan and his harem—figures of fascination to Europeans in this period. *Doxies* is criminal slang for ‘She-beggars, Trulls, Wenches, Whores’ (*NCD*).